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# Masters Program Key to Tomorrow's Mission

By  
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When the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) set out to increase educational opportunities for the Department of Defense (DoD) international affairs community, it partnered with Boston's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy of Tufts University for a unique initiative. The Global Masters of Arts Program (GMAP) II, a 12-month graduate program, combines three two-week residency sessions with state-of-the-art internet-based courses of study.

The ink was barely dry on the Memorandum of Understanding between DSCA and Tufts University before students began lining up for the accelerated graduate program. Since its inception, in September 2001, more than 70 DoD security cooperation professionals have gone through the school.

The Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management (DISAM) coordinated the funding and activities of the departments and agencies wishing to participate in the program and works in close partnership with Tufts University.

The initial thought was to have a quality international affairs graduate program that would further the careers of our civilian security cooperation workforce, explained DISAM Commandant Dr. Ron Reynolds.

He said the mission was given to DISAM because it serves as the education center for the security cooperation community. DSCA-sponsored students are drawn from foreign military sales funded positions. There are thirty-five students per class and DoD currently fills twelve of those slots. As one class closes, another is formed. Reynolds, who is dedicated to strengthening the academic and intellectual foundation of the security cooperation community, begins canvassing DoD, seeking out civilians who hunger to expand their knowledge of international relations and global affairs. He admits there is enormous satisfaction in watching students successfully maneuver through the program.

This program is no cake walk, Reynolds added. The courses are designed to prepare students to face the challenges associated with international relations. We want students to come away from the program with renewed energy and ideas that contribute to both their future and the future of their organization.



**Dr. Reynolds, Commandant of the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management, offers remarks during the 2007 Global Master of Arts graduation ceremony at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts.**

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He said supervisors should understand that graduating from the program can boost an employee's career, but this initiative is designed to benefit the organization. According to Reynolds, there have been a number of Navy military personnel selected for the foreign area officer program based on graduating from GMAP II. Nichole Petras, DSCA operations directorate, graduated from the program in April 2007. She said at times it was a challenge balancing the stress of school, work, and home life, but she managed to meet all of the requirements within the course time line.

"I have learned a lot from studying international politics, security studies, and will certainly be able to apply what I have learned to my position in the security cooperation community," she explained. "I was able to incorporate my experience at DSCA into my Masters Thesis, 'Reassessing Military Aid to Egypt' in which I analyze the future of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Egypt and the possible repercussions of changing the thirty-year precedent set by the United States government." Petras said the course requires a lot of teamwork, which can also promote a few challenges. "In the end we became very close," she added. "As a result we have established a tight network of friends from as far away as Latvia, Nigeria, Indonesia, France and Taiwan." "The diversity of the participation is critical to the exchange of information and ideas," said Reynolds. "We want to bring together folks with various security cooperation expertise and perspectives."

According to Petras, completing the GMAP graduate program helped her meet the goal of becoming a Country Program Manager at DSCA. "The GMAP is an incredible program and I recommend that others apply. However, applicants should understand that the program is quite demanding," she said.

Reynolds said applications for the program are accepted between April and December. He said the military departments have their selection process, but he reviews every DSCA sponsored nominee prior to forwarding the application package to the Fletcher School. The class is made up of U.S. and international students. The hope is that each country represented will offer unique and valuable perspectives that excite and inspire one another.

There is no Graduate Admissions Test requirement, but the program does require a language proficiency exam. Reynolds said students have one year beyond the academic year of active participation to complete language requirements without incurring additional personal expense, according to Petras the language requirement can prove challenging for some students. Petras stated the following:

I recommend students begin preparing and studying for the language portion of the program prior to the start of the GMAP to avoid doing it concurrently with the coursework or after graduation.

The program is in its fourth year, and has just completed recruiting for year five. Reynolds suggests supervisors actively pursue star candidates to participate in the program, realizing there is a commitment by the individual and their organization. Reynolds noted the GMAP II is a short term, but healthy investment that will reap long-term benefits for the individual and the future of the security cooperation community.